THE NATIONAL MEMORY

AN ADDRESS DELIVERED BY

GEORGE EDGAR VINCENT

BEFORE

THE WASHINGTON ASSOCIATION OF NEW JERSEY

With Greeting by HON. ALFRED ELMER MILLS

And Remarks in Memory of the late President, Jonathan W. Roberts, by

HON. WILLARD W. CUTLER

and Proceedings in the Celebration

AT WASHINGTON'S HEADQUARTERS

IN MORRISTOWN, N. J.

On February 22nd, 1913

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HEADQUARTERS, MORRISTOWN, NEW JERSEY,
February 22, 1913.

Hon. Alfred Elmer Mills in the chair.

MR. MILLS:

We will open our exercises this afternoon by singing the first two stanzas of "America." Mr. Bennell will lead us.

[Singing of "America."]

MR. MILLS:

My friends, a distinguished American patriot once said, "The deeper I drink of the cup of life, the sweeter it is—all the sugar is at the bottom." We all of us have in mind a man who, in his declining years, had that same hopeful attitude toward life.

Before we proceed with the formal exercises of the day, I will call on Vice-President Cutler to say a few words about our honored and beloved president, the late Jonathan W. Roberts. [Applause.]

MR. WILLARD W. CUTLER:

Mr. Chairman and Gentlemen:—

We are assembled to celebrate the birthday of George Washington, under whose leadership the thirteen weak and struggling colonies were united into an independent government, and only ten days ago the Country celebrated the birthday of Abraham Lincoln who prevented the dissolution of that Union.

Both of these great men have passed from earth, and gone to their reward, and a grateful Nation recalls not their death, but their birth, not the loss the Nation has suffered but the great benefits it has received and still enjoys, as a result of what they did for their fellowmen.

And so to-day while we miss the venerable and stately form, and the pleasant, cheerful greeting of our late honored

and beloved President, and keenly feel the great loss the Association has suffered, as well as our personal loss in his death, our sadness is alleviated when we remember all that he accomplished while the executive officer of this Association. But in order to realize the extent of his service, let me briefly refer to the history of the Association previous to his election as President.

Twenty-one gentlemen, among whom were Theodore F. Randolph, George A. Halsey, Francis S. Lathrop, William V. V. Lidgerwood, Augustus W. Cutler, William L. King, William Walter Phelps, and Cortlandt Parker, were on the twentieth day of May A. D. 1874, incorporated by an Act of the Legislature as the Washington Association of New Jersey.

These incorporators not only gave their time and money to form this Association, so that the building in which Washington spent two winters during the War of the Revolution should be preserved for future generations, but they realized the Association needed at its head a man of culture and business abilty, one who could give his time and attention to its necessities and eventually fill the Headquarters with rare and historical articles relating to revolutionary times. On June 29, 1887, they elected as President, Mr. Jonathan W. Roberts, who had already proved his fitness and ability for this position while serving for three years as a member of the Board of Trustees and Executive Committee, and so satisfactorily did he fill the position that he was unanimously continued as President until the time of his death.

Mr. Roberts never believed in doing anything in a half hearted way; whatever was worth doing, was worth doing well, however much work it caused, and he carried out these views as President of this Association.

At the time he accepted this responsible position, the only property owned by the Association was the Headquarters building, and the lot on which it stood and a very few historical relics to interest visitors; the membership was only eighty nine, and they were carrying a debt of about

$15,000 the interest on which sum had to be paid, as well as the running expenses of the Association.

But Mr. Roberts' ability and energy soon made itself felt, and, with his hand guiding, the Association began to flourish as never before. The membership was increased to over five hundred, and to day we have, among our members, leading men in every business and profession, and I say it without fear of contradiction, that there was never gathered together in this State a more representative and influential body of men than I see before me.

The property has been enlarged by the purchase of adjoining lands. These beautiful Lafayette Rooms and the Cottage adjoining have been built and paid for; the debt has been satisfied, and there is an invested capital of $25,000 which is bringing in an annual revenue, and in addition to all this the Headquarters now contains one of the most valuable and interesting collections of revolutionary relics to be found in any one place, and all this was accomplished by the energy, ability and persistent effort of our late President.

His work is finished and he has left behind him, not only warm personal friends who will always remember him as an honorable, Christian gentlemen, never refusing or neglecting to do what he considered right, and always ready and willing to assist and help his fellowmen, but he has so identified himself with this Association that it will stand as a monument to his memory more lasting than one of marble or bronze, teaching future generations that spirit of self-sacrifice and true patriotism which filled the heart and soul of Washington and Lincoln, and enabled Mr. Roberts to devote so much of his life for the benefit of others. Truly we can say of him, he made his life sublime, and departing, left behind him a monument that will endure through all time. [Applause.]

Mr. Mills:

We will now sing the first and third stanzas of "Auld Lang Syne."

[Singing of "Auld Lang Syne."]

Mr. Mills:

Fellow members and friends of the Association: It becomes my agreeable duty to welcome you once more to the old Morristown home. I am glad to say your Association is in a flourishing condition, but your Board of Trustees think that our membership can be strengthened - not in quality, that would be impossible, but in numbers. I am requested to announce that we have two vacancies. If any of you know suitable persons, equal to yourselves, to fill these vacancies, please send their names to our secretary, Mr. Henry C. Pitney, Jr., or to any member of the executive committee.

Talleyrand once said that nothing could be more pleasant than life, if one could experience it as a member of the old French aristocracy prior to the French revolution. Poor fellow, he was not an American nor a member of the Washington Association. There is a subtle influence that draws us back to this old town. Only the other day I heard of a remarkable instance of this irresistible, attractive force. A man had left this world for the celestial regions; he was received with the utmost cordiality by St. Peter and a very polite angel was detailed to show him around. He enjoyed meeting the other angels, but was somewhat mystified when he saw some persons chained to trees. "Why," said he, "what does this mean?" "Oh," said the angel, "those persons came from Morristown, New Jersey, and we have to chain them up to prevent them from going back." [Laughter.]

Since we were here, gentlemen, twelve months ago, we have passed through a political revolution and the country has been saved for four years more. Perhaps the country is safer than your income will be, if the proposed income tax legislation goes through. [Laughter.]

Maybe you would like to know what income is. It is sometimes easier to define it, than it is to get it. Sometimes both definition and possession come without trouble, as they did to a small boy whose teacher was introducing

him to the elements of political economy. The youngster was asked to frame a sentence giving his idea of the meaning of income. "Why, certainly," said the boy, "I opened the door and 'in come' the cat." [Laughter.]

With most of us income is somewhat less active. There is only one thing for you to do, gentlemen, be philosophical. After all, the attack on income is an old chestnut Be like a young friend of mine who burst out in uproarious laughter over a story which was of the chestnut variety. His brother exposulated and said "Why, John, why do you laugh at that; it is as old as the hills." "I don't care if it is," said Johnny, "it is real wit." Why, last night, when I thought of that story I kicked all the slats out of the bed. [Laughter.] If you can't laugh at the attack that is being made on your pocketbooks, I would ask you to remember that General Washington once swore. But—don't do it.

During the many years that we have had our annual gatherings we have listened to brilliant speakers from North, East, South and West—great clergymen, great lawyers, great educators, great statesmen.

We have learned to respect views widely different from our own.

In this, as in all countries the two great forces of conservation and radicalism, the one centripetal, the other centrifugal, are constantly striving for the mastery.

Either in supreme control would destroy all progress. Both are held in check by the educated intelligence of our people. Without our schools, colleges and universities, the future of this country would be very dark. With them we are safe.

We have with us to-day the president of one of the greatest and largest of our American universities, who is to give us an address on "The National Memory." I take very great pleasure in introducing the president of the University of Minnesota, Dr. George E. Vincent. [Applause.]

"THE NATIONAL MEMORY."

(Abstract of an address by George Edgar Vincent before the Washington Association of New Jersey, at Morristown, N. J., February 22, 1913.)

GENTLEMEN :—

The introduction by the chairman leaves me in doubt about the part which I am to play on this occasion. I am uncertain whether he expects me as a radical to stir you from a conservative lethargy, or as a reactionary to be swept away by your irresistable passion for progress. Without attempting to settle the question let me assume that we shall preserve some sort of mental equilibrium.

We meet to celebrate a great life; to give vitality if may be to a hero, to grasp his meaning for our country. The task may well give us pause. Our thoughts run into conventional molds, our speech into well-worn traditional phrases. For memory merges into habit, and anniversaries take on a ritual of routine. Nevertheless to revive the past, to make it for the moment vivid, to turn old memories into new purposes—such is at once the baffling duty and the high privilege of this hour.

Men give meaning to life by likening one thing to another. Thought and language record the myths and metaphors by which men have tried to explain and to enrich their experience. Human speech is full of fossil poetry. The simile-making habits of mankind have dealt with societies and nations. Polybius asserted that a whole people passes from youth, through manhood, to old age and death. Hobbes saw in society a huge creature made up of a multitude of men. Spencer traced in minute detail the analogy between an animal body and the social organism. Wash-

ington has given us a mechanical figure. "A Federal government," he said, "is the main-spring which keeps the clock of the States going." Of late philosophers have pushed the likeness into the psychic field. Such phrases as "the public mind," "the popular will," suggest a parallel between society and personality. Thus a nation becomes a vast on-going common life with habits, memories, character and purpose.

The Nation looked at in this way has a tradition, a history which may be likened to the memory of an individual. Nor is the parallel wholly fanciful. To-day throughout our land we are refreshing the national memory. We fix our gaze upon the past. The Revolutionary panorama dominated by the figure of Washington passes through our minds. We turn again with renewed courage to the future. Let us for a little time seek suggestions from this likeness between the National history and the personal memory.

Without memory there can be no personality; without history no nation. The loss of individual memory is a real destruction of the self. No event in personal life has meaning until it is explained by past experience. So it is with a nation. Only a knowledge of its history gives a clue to its character. The United States can have no real significance to a mind that knows nought of Washington, of Marshall, of Lincoln, and the things for which they stood. We cannot realize ourselves as a national group unless in imagination we can picture the onward sweep of events, the pageant of the past, which has made us what we are. The child, because he lacks the background of experience, must be guided and if need be coerced from without. Washington by his grasp of the situation and by his indomitable will was able to force upon the colonies ideas and policies which there was no common history to suggest and foster. Washington's letters to Congress and to the Colonial governors brought to bear a pressure which was sorely needed. When his fellows were thinking provincially Washington was planning for a national movement. They saw only a revolt against oppression; he had a clear vision of a new people

occupying a vast territory. It was a part of the greatness of Washington that in time of need he could supply in some degree the lack of an historical tradition for an infant nation.

A vague or fallacious memory weakens personality and impairs efficiency. In the same way if citizens have a fragmentary and false picture of their country's history the nation will lack true unity and fail to respond wisely to new issues. A whole people and its leaders may be ignorant of the past or misinterpret it and so lack stability and strength of national character. The misinterpretation of the past may lead to a dangerous self satisfaction and intolerable priggishness in an individual. So a nation by refusing to face frankly its mistakes may suffer from arrogance and fall into a fool's paradise. It is well for us to remember that all the revolutionists were not self effacing and magnanimous patriots. An English admirer of Washington has said that one of the most convincing proofs of his true greatness was his ability to endure his fellow Americans. It is important for us to know our heroes accurately. The many myths about Washington which assert his precocious and sublimated veracity, his coldness, his aristocratic distrust of popular government, his commonplace mental abilities, are persistent misinterpretations which affect the national memory and impair its social efficiency.

Memory fosters pride, which is a condition of achievement. The man who brings things to pass gains courage from the memory of his successes, just as he attains humility by frank recollection of his failures. Sound national pride is a spur to effort and a means of progress. It is well to distinguish between vanity and pride. The former is mere anxiety to win admiration, the latter springs from obligation to be true to character, loyal to the past. Vain boasting is a different thing from self-reliant pride which stirs sentiment, releases power, and spurs to action. For all the stories about his clothes, Washington was not a vain man. He was not always seeking to conform to the expectations of those about him. He did not pose before the looking-glasses in the minds of men and women. His

strength of character came from within, from the memory of his past and the persistent image of his life's purpose.

Memory selects and preserves vivid and vital experiences. It forgets the trivial and unimportant. So the national history perpetuates essential things. Heroes in due time become types. Their virtues are exalted; their weaknesses ignored. Washington lives for the nation in those noble qualities which meant so much for our existence as a people. Historical scholars most properly investigate minutely and reproduce for us in every available detail the true Washington, the human Washington and the like. But for the nation Washington has inevitably taken on an heroic character. We remember not his directions to his tailor, not his choleric outbursts, not his thrifty interest in his western lands, but we recall his unswerving loyalty, his uncomplaining sacrifice of personal preference, his military leadership, his statesman's grasp of affairs, his indomitable will, his prophetic vision of weak and mutually distrustful colonies united in a mighty nation.

Memory is preserved and deepened by symbols, by repetitions, by conscious thought. A nation that would perpetuate its history must be ever vigilant and resourceful. Flags, pictures, monuments, play a vital part. Anniversaries, memorial days, festivals, historic pageants, vivify the national memory. These celebrations must not be permitted to become mere unconscious routine. They must not degenerate into mere holidays for pleasure and recreation. Just as the individual cannot safely allow his memory to grow dim, to lose its power over his imagination, its influence upon his character, so the nation cannot with impunity neglect the means for keeping the sense of the past vivid in the minds of all its citizens. You are to be congratulated upon your association which aims at precisely this service of keeping alive a memory of the great leader and his times. You deserve well of the country.

Memory cannot serve the future until imagination has translated the past into new ideals and purposes. Historical conditions never repeat themselves. Every new situation

is in some sense unique. Old heroism has to be translated into new courage. The valor of war must be turned into the virtues of peace. War is dramatic. It rushes on to climax and decision. It has moments of great achievement. It culminates in victory or defeat. The new civic heroism works under other conditions. These seem too often commonplace. They make little appeal to the romantic imagination. There is doubtless some likeness between the battle of arms and the struggle for safer sanitary conditions, better housing, the protection of women and children, for public recreation, for political reform, for justice, tolerance and good will. It requires, however, a resourceful imagination to hold this likeness steadily before the mind and to turn fancy into conduct. Yet the past must be pressed into the service of the present and the future. As we meet in honor of the man who made our common country possible, as our minds run back over his deeds and his character let us translate his courage into the new fortitude, his devotion into new forms of patriotic service.

Memory is a deposit of countless details, a few of them salient and conspicuous, but most of them merged into general impressions and lost sight of as separate items. Thus the national memory exalts a few famous individuals, but at the same time it carries on a mass of personal influences, potent though anonymous. It is a noble service to contribute inspiring ideas and deeds which live in the national memory. Few if any of us gathered here to-day can hope to have our names carried down by the general tradition of the nation. Washington lives and will live as a great personality. Our influence must be merged in the vast ongoing common life.

We deepen then to-day the national memory. We pass on through other minds into the minds of generations yet unborn the glorious panorama of the past. Let us highly resolve that the national memory shall be turned into present loyalty and future efficiency. As the figure of Washington stands forth once more in our minds let us recognize the obligations which he has laid upon us. Let us

pledge ourselves anew with due sense of gratitude and devotion to be true to the national memory and to turn this into a noble national purpose.

Mr. Mills:

I hear many motions extending the thanks of the Association to Doctor Vincent for his powerful address. All in favor of these motions, please rise. [Entire audience arose.] I bid you farewell for another year.